DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TREATMENT OF STATE A/CDC/PR

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July 10, 1981

FOIA OR PA EXT DATE

PA ONLY REASON(S)

ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS

DECLASSIFIED RELEASABLE

RELEASE DENIED

PA OR FOIA EXEMPTIONS

TO: S - Ambassador Eagleburger
NEA - Ambassador Veliotes
PM - Mr. Burt

FROM: PA - Dean E. Fischer, Designate

SUBJECT: Public Doubts Bombing of Iraqi Nuclear Reactor Justified, But Opposes "Punishing" Israel for the Attack

A CBS/New York Times poll released last week provides the first evidence of the American public's reactions to Israel's bombing of Iraq's nuclear facilities. Four-fifths of the public said they had heard about the raid. Those claiming awareness were (1) evenly divided on whether the Israeli attack was justified, but (2) overwhelmingly opposed "punishing" Israel for what it did.

Two further questions were put to the 80 percent of respondents who said they had heard or read something about Israel's attack on the nuclear reactor in Iraq:

	Justified	Not Justified	No Opinion
(1) "Do you think Israel was or was not justified in making that attack?"	39%	37%	24%

	Take No Action Against Israel	Punish Israel	No Opinion
(2) "Do you think the United States should punish Israel in some way for the attack or should the United States take no action against Israel?"	48%	38%	14%

Reactions to the Israeli raid were fairly similar among Democrats, Republicans and various other population groups. A large majority of each group opposed "punishing" Israel for the attack. Even those who felt Israel's raid was unjustified opposed the U.S. taking punitive action against Israel (58 percent opposed vs 35 percent in favor).

Because the question was worded in terms of "punishing" Israel, some respondents may have interpreted it to mean direct

possibly adverse U.S. actions. Presumably, some who opposed "punishment" might have approved limited sanctions, such as suspending deliveries of advanced military aircraft. However, CBS did not inquire about the public's reaction to specific limited measures.

An earlier poll suggests that the American public's willingness to impose sanctions on Israel for acts opposed by the U.S. Government is influenced by the context in which the actions are presumed to occur. A Harris poll taken in July, 1980, found that a plurality of the public said they would approve "threatening to withhold economic and military aid from Israel if it became so unbending that the chances for peace in the Middle East grew much worse" (44 percent approved threat to withhold aid vs 37 percent disapproved). However, responses to another question on the same poll showed the public disinclined to withhold aid from a recalcitrant Israeli Government if that meant the Arabs would have military superiority in case of another war (25 percent approved withholding aid vs 50 percent disapproved).

Drafted: PA/OAP ARichman:ecm
x. 22267 7/9/81

July 13, 1981

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

Thank you for your letter of June 19 in which you expressed concern over the sale of Israeli air attack and air defense equipment to Jordan. I appreciate your taking the time to write me on this matter and to personally receive the Israeli delegation which delivered your letter. The following information will be helpful to you and your colleagues.

On June 8, the U.S. Government informed the Israeli Air Attache in Washington that it was our intention to sell Jordan certain air defense equipment and to offer for sale to Jordan certain aircraft. The U.S. Government has not committed itself in any way to any specific sale of any of these items and has not informed Jordan of its intentions.

On June 10, as you correctly noted in your letter, the President decided to approve the sale to Jordan of four F-16 aircraft to Israel and the first of thirty F-16 aircraft to Jordan. After consultations with Congress and pursuant to Section 3 of the Arms Export Control Act, Secretary Haig sent letters to the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate on June 30 formally notifying the Congress of the proposed sales. The Congress has thirty days in which to act on the proposed sales. If Congress does not act within that period, the sales may proceed.

The statement by Israeli officials that Israel's security would be threatened by the sale of these aircraft to Jordan is not accepted by the United States Government. We believe that the sale will not alter the military balance in the area in any significant way. Israel has a decisive lead in the overall air force balance and in the air defense balance. The aircraft which Jordan will receive are not as capable as those which Israel has received and will receive. Moreover, Jordan's air defense capability will be significantly improved by the sale of the Hawk missiles. Jordan's ability to attack Israel will not be significantly increased by the sale of the aircraft.

We are convinced that the sale of these items to Jordan will not threaten Israel's security. Israel remains militarily superior to the combined military forces of all its neighbors. We are confident that Israel will maintain its military superiority after the sale of these items to Jordan.

We appreciate your views on this matter and look forward to continuing consultations with your government.

Sincerely yours,

Ronald Reagan

The Honorable
Menachem Begin,
Prime Minister of Israel.

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